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San Diego Response To Hurricane Katrina

August 30, 2005

We are all deeply saddened by the stories and photos coming out of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama in the wake of the ongoing devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families, emergency workers and government officials affected by and dealing with this natural disaster. I know that the City of San Diego and its people will do everything we can to help the people of these states get through this difficult time.

I have been in close contact with City Manager Lamont Ewell and Fire-Rescue Department Chief Jeff Bowman, who have been working together to develop a plan for the City of San Diego's response to this situation.

Chief Bowman has indicated to me that in response to requests from state and federal emergency agencies, the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department has sent 17 personnel to assist in search, recovery and rescue efforts in the affected region. The personnel sent include 11 members of the San Diego Lifeguard Swiftwater Rescue Team, which is nationally recognized for its expertise in ocean and river rescue operations. These personnel are currently situated at March Air Force Base outside Riverside, and will be dispatched to the disaster area on the next available flight, which is scheduled to depart at 1:00 A.M. tomorrow morning.

The other six members of the rescue contingent are firefighters who are specially trained in search, rescue and structural collapse operations. Locally, they are assigned to San Diego Urban Search and Rescue Task Force 8. This Task Force, which is sponsored by San Diego, is one of eight in the State of California and 28 nationwide.

All of the costs associated with San Diego's response to assist with Hurricane Katrina will be reimbursed to the City of San Diego by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and/or the State of California's Office of Emergency Service.

For those members of the public wanting to assist victims of the hurricane, there is a profound need for financial assistance to help with lodging, food, clothing, and sadly, in

some cases, burial costs. The most immediate way to help is to make a financial donation to the American Red Cross or the Salvation Army, which have set up funds specifically for this disaster.

I will keep you informed of further assistance opportunities, such as the donation of clothing, non-perishable food products, and personal hygiene items, as they become known to us by FEMA.

It is in difficult times like these that we, as Americans, band together to help our neighbors in need. The vast number of calls for assistance that are coming into local emergency service organizations is heartwarming, and will provide much comfort to those families in the South dealing with this horrible tragedy.

At times like this we are reminded that natural disasters often strike without warning. San Diego has its own potential natural hazards, including earthquakes, wildfires, and floods. I encourage everyone to take the necessary steps to protect themselves and their families by maintaining an emergency preparedness kit. For more information on how to be better prepared in case of a natural disaster, check out the City of San Diego's Fire-Rescue Department's web page at www.sandiego.gov/fireandems/cert/disaster.shtml or the American Red Cross at www.redcross.org/prepare/makeaplan.html.

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